

Consultation stage 2 response. Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal Democrats

This submission relates to the proposals for the Rhondda Cynon Taf area in particular.

Having read the submissions made and the verbatim records of the presentations made to the review panel we would like to offer our support to the alternative proposal put forward by the Conservative party in their revised (2nd) submission.

We believe this to offer the most logical solution, taking into account the most positive aspects of the Welsh Liberal Democrat and Plaid submissions and offering what we see as the best solution for the three constituencies which make up the major part of Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Whilst there is going to be resistance from some to any change in existing boundaries and historic names then this cannot be avoided completely, and so there is a need to keep these to a minimum. We also recognise the principles upon which the Commission based its proposals and indeed which are part of the legislation - the desire to preserve community ties where possible and not cause excessive disruption across other electoral boundaries.

The original Welsh Liberal Democrat submission makes a good attempt to address some of the major anomalies in the initial Commission document – such as the suggestion that the Cynon Valley be split in three and Mountain Ash and Penrhiwceiber be joined with the Rhondda. As has been pointed out the only direct transport link between the two is over a B class mountain road and this makes the Commission's original outline impractical.

However, the (Welsh Liberal Democrat) submission, in our view, creates other anomalies which would result in split communities and divisions across school catchment areas and electoral boundaries. This was obviously not the intention, but to anyone with local knowledge these are evident.

The Conservative alternative proposal avoids some of the issues which were not foreseen by those who put together the official Welsh Liberal Democrats response but which, with local know how, we can see causing problems, for example:

- Putting two of the Pontypridd Town Council wards (Rhondda and Glyncoch) into a new Rhondda Fach and Cynon constituency. Now whilst it could be argued that it is already the case that the Town Council is split across two constituencies (Cilfynydd and Glyncoch are part of the current Cynon Valley constituency) this move would only cause greater confusion.
- Splitting the Llantwit Fardre ward off from the rest of the Llantwit Fardre Community Council area and putting that ward with Rhondda Fawr and Llantrisant. Tonteg, Church Village and Llantwit Fardre share combined history including strong community and sporting links and it would make no sense to split them across constituency boundaries.

School catchment areas would be split apart in several instances:

- Pupils from the Rhondda ward go to Pontypridd High School which it is suggested would be in Cardiff North West and Pontypridd.
- Pupils from Church Village (which it is proposed stays in CNW&P) go to Bryncelynnog which it is suggested becomes part of Rhondda Fawr and Llantrisant.
- Pupils from Ynysybwl which it is proposed becomes part of the Rhondda Fach and Cynon constituency attend Pontypridd High School which would move to CNW &P.

- Pupils from Trealaw (Proposed Rhondda & Llantrisant ward) go to Porth County Comprehensive which would move to the Rhondda Fach and Cynon constituency.

Geographically there are flaws. The Porth ward, for instance, is put in with the Rhondda Fach and Cynon. Now whilst it does form the link between the two Rhondda Valleys most of the ward is in the Rhondda Fawr – it extends up into the Rhondda Fawr towards Trealaw on one side of the railway line and includes Dinas on the other side. People there would be surprised to find themselves in a Rhondda Fach constituency.

The Rhondda ward is very definitely part of Pontypridd town and is certainly nowhere near the Rhondda Fach nor does it connect anywhere with the Cynon Valley. Pontypridd RFC is based in the Rhondda ward at Sardis Road – good luck explaining to anyone associated with the club that they are going to be part of a constituency called anything other than Pontypridd.

Despite its name, residents of the Rhondda ward (Pwllgwaun, Maesycoed and Hopkinstown) certainly do not think of themselves as part of the Rhondda. They most certainly do not associate themselves with the Rhondda Fach Fach with which there is no direct geographical connection. With regard to logical transport links, residents from the Rhondda ward would drive through Pontypridd town to get to Abercynon.

There seems to be general agreement that where possible the Commission should look to retaining communities and preserving existing links. The Conservative alternative proposal we believe makes a great deal of sense with regard to this – although the inclusion of Nelson in the Pontypridd constituency does seem somewhat random, as there is little community connection between that ward and the proposed constituency. However, there is obviously a need for such adjustments in some instances and so we would not put up any argument against it. Whatever options are taken it will be difficult if not impossible to avoid some cross-over of Health Board boundaries, and we do not see that as a major problem. This proposal keeps this to an absolute minimum.

It also preserves the Rhondda as a complete unit – this is important as although geographically it is true to say that the Rhondda consists of two separate valleys Rhondda residents do not make that distinction. There is certainly little affinity between people of the Rhondda Fach and the Cynon Valley. Yes, the communities are similar in their socio-economic make up and share the same Local Authority, but there are few community links.

On the other hand Tonyrefail has more in common with the Rhondda than with the Pontypridd area, although it is currently part of the Pontypridd constituency. We would argue that, despite the comments made by the Labour Councillor and ex Councillor for Tonyrefail putting those wards in the Rhondda constituency makes sense.

The majority of people in Cilfynydd and Glyncoch would not object to becoming part of a Pontypridd constituency once again, as this would reinstate historical boundaries. These wards are already part of the Pontypridd Town Council area, and so these proposals would unite the Town Council area in one constituency. Likewise many Ynysybwl residents would view Pontypridd as their main town.

There will of course be objections from some quarters to the splitting of the Cynon Valley, but it is inevitable that some current constituencies will be lost wholly or in part. **The Conservative proposal avoids the scenario where a chunk of the current Cynon Valley is cast adrift and randomly joined with the Rhondda.**

Regarding the Pontypridd constituency then the option originally proposed by the Commission would probably have met with least resistance. However, this causes problems with adjacent constituencies both within Rhondda Cynon Taff and elsewhere - such as the previously mentioned problem with the way the Cynon was split.

The official Welsh Liberal Democrat proposal was seen as a way to redress the Cynon problem as well as ensuring that the numbers add up elsewhere. **Yet the proposal to form a Cardiff North West and Pontypridd constituency will not meet with approval of residents and does not make sense in terms of preserving community links.**

The only thing that links Pontypridd with Cardiff is the road and rail network. **There is absolutely no affinity between the areas of Pontypridd and those of Cardiff North and West which it is suggested come together.** One only has to look at the reaction to the regional rugby team based in Cardiff to see that. As previously mentioned the proposal would also split the Pontypridd Town Council area and create a geographical anomaly.

We very strongly object to Pontypridd as the county town of Rhondda Cynon Taff being subsumed and becoming secondary to Cardiff North and West.

In conclusion we believe that the Conservative's 2nd proposal is more sensible in terms of keeping like communities together whilst still preserving the integrity of the Cardiff city constituencies, and urge the Commission to adopt it.

Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal Democrats